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S E C R E T AMMAN 000689

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [IS](#) [JO](#)

SUBJECT: SHALOM VISIT POSTPONED

Classified By: CDA David Hale for reasons 1.5 (b) (d)

11. (S) By mutual Jordanian-Israeli agreement, Israeli Foreign Minister Silvan Shalom's January 28 visit to Jordan has been postponed. Jordanian Foreign Minister Marwan Muasher told Charge late January 27 that Shalom refused to come without a scheduled meeting with King Abdullah, an ultimatum Muasher found unacceptable. He told Charge the King had real scheduling problems but didn't want to see Shalom in any event. Muasher asked Shalom to reconsider, arguing that he and PM Faisal al-Fayez still wanted to receive him. Muasher feigned disappointment, telling Charge the government would now look as if it had backed down when confronted with parliamentary opposition to the visit. Although Muasher emphasized that there was "no political dimension" to the failure to set a meeting with the King, his office director (protect) told PolCouns that the Israeli insistence on a meeting with the King was "aimed only at Israeli public opinion" and did not take into consideration Jordan's increasingly vocal parliamentary opposition. He cast the refusal to schedule a meeting with the King as designed to protect the King personally from the expected political fallout from the visit.

12. (S) The Israeli Ambassador here told Charge (somewhat contradictorily) that the Jordanian position was both an effort to sideline Shalom (intolerable for Shalom politically) and a pretext designed to engineer an Israeli cancellation and postpone an increasingly inconvenient visit, and on the second point we share his analysis. In particular, the breakthrough on an Israeli-Hizballah prisoner exchange, and statements by Hizballah SYG Nasrallah claiming that Jordanian prisoner releases were part of the deal, embarrassed the Jordanians, as just such a release was to be the primary outcome of the Shalom visit. The Israeli Ambassador told us that despite unhappiness with the collapse of the proposed visit, Shalom remained committed to the process of returning the prisoners.

13. (S) Comment: This development shows the degree to which aspects of Jordan-Israel relations are increasingly affected by perceived slights, and may make progress on a range of issues, including prisoner releases and outstanding trade and economic relations, harder to attain. However, core defense and intelligence ties remain strong and insulated from these irritants.

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HALE